

Silver City Sun-News - July 15, 2010

By Christine Steele

SILVER CITY - Congressman Harry Teague, D-N.M., met with Silver City veterans and sustainability promoters in two roundtable discussions Saturday.

On "green" energy initiatives, Teague said he thought Silver City was already ahead of the curve on looking at sources and solutions, but wanted to hear from local green energy stakeholders on what he could do to help the region attract more "green" energy jobs.

In attendance were Nick Susillo, director of the Joint Office of Sustainability in the Town of Silver City's Community Development Department; Allyson Siwik with the Gila Resources Information Project and the Gila Conservation Coalition, which produces the Viva Verde Green Building Guide and conference; Gordon West, owner of Gila WoodNet and Santa Clara Woodworks; Cissy McAndrew, president of the New Mexico Solar Energy Silver City Chapter, and a member of the steering committee of the Green Energy Chamber and an eco-broker with United Country Mimbres Realty; and Gwyn Jones and Lori Ford with the Morning Show.

McAndrew, who said she has been working on energy sustainability issues since the late 1970s, said she would like to see more government control on appliance manufacturers to make them more energy efficient and more stringent and standardized testing of appliances labeled "EnergyStar."

She also said she would like to see more funding for green jobs shifted from academic training to hands-on training, and more education with consumers, to help them make cost-effective energy choices.

Siwik said Teague could help with a Smart Grid program and by making incentives available to make it cost-effective.

West said he would like to see the use of national laboratories to test alternative forms of insulation, and a more objective economic analysis on energy issues and alternative energy building materials.

"Thirty percent of the cost of a bag of insulation shipped from Oklahoma is shipping costs," he said. Displacing some of those shipping costs would save the consumer money and cut down on pollution from trucking.

"Within a couple of years we expect to be able to build a house with 75 percent local materials," he added.

Susillo said the country is in a transition phase with energy, but not everyone was on the same page. Some companies might not have a vested interest in seeing green energy choices implemented or expanded.

"We are not all aligned philosophically or financially and that can be better addressed at the federal level," he said.

For the veteran's roundtable, Teague rolled out his Veterans' Bill of Rights, which outlined eight points that he hoped to ensure for veterans, including quality, accessible and affordable healthcare, which seemed to be one of the most important issue to those in attendance.

"New Mexico is still far behind in dealing with veterans," said Armando Amador.

The lack of a local medical facility to care for veterans was a concern to all.

"A lot of our vets have gotten frustrated with the VA in Albuquerque because they don't like dealing with the older vets, so they go to Tucson because they get better treatment," said Karen Young, a veteran who served seven years with the National Guard.

"Here we have Fort Bayard where we could create a continuum of care model," said Katherine Brown, with the Veterans Health Alliance and the Operation Fort Bayard Task Force. "There is so much opportunity out there. It is a huge piece of property, but the buildings are in disrepair and if we don't do something very soon it will be too late. We have it here. We just need the funding. We have 50,000 people in a four-county area and 15,000 of them are veterans."

The other issue those in attendance brought to light was that not all veterans receive benefits once they are discharged.

Both Young and Armando Arzola, a retired veteran who served 28 year with the Air Force, noted that National Guardsman who are activated for duty do not receive benefits unless they serve more than 180 days of active duty.

"The major fact uncovered here today is that we have two classes of soldiers and we need to change that," Teague said.

"I think the important thing is to get veterans the same benefits," said Grant County Commissioner Mary Ann Sedillo. "How can anyone not support that?"

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Teague town hall

•Congressman Harry Teague will host a Telephone Town Hall for veterans across southern New Mexico tonight to discuss his Veterans Bill of Rights proposal. •Teague will also discuss new guidelines announced by the Department of Veterans Affairs that will improve access to PTSD treatment for veterans. Participants will have the opportunity ask questions and learn more about Teague's work to honor and support New Mexico's Veterans.

•Teague's veterans Telephone Town Hall is part of a series of discussions across southern New Mexico to help shape his new "Veterans Bill of Rights." The meetings, comprised of local veterans and veterans' service organization representatives, have focused on further developing the Veterans Bill of Rights, which Teague intends for Congress to use as a guide as it seeks to improve benefits and services for veterans. Teague unveiled a draft proposal of the legislation during his address to the joint session of the New Mexico Veterans of Foreign Wars Convention in Albuquerque.

- Teague encourages any of his constituents who are interested in veteran's issues to contact his office at 1-888-9-TEAGUE to get details on how to participate in the Tele-Town Hall, from 6 to 7 p.m. today.